

North Texas Daily

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Sports

Junior midfielder Mia Bernard finds identity in faith, helps foster positive team environment

By Haylie Stum
Senior Sports Writer

Junior midfielder Mia Bernard is known for her smile. It is not often someone will see her without an infectious grin, which is a glimpse into her contributions to the team’s culture. Not many would guess Bernard once defined her career as “exhausting,” however, allowing the sport to rule her life.

Playing for a competitive club and high school team, Bernard placed immense importance on performing between the lines, to the point where it directly impacted how she evaluated herself. Through personal growth, she has become what coaches and players refer to as “the point guard” of the team, both on and off the field.

“I’m not just a soccer player,” Bernard said. “I’m also a human, and soccer is just a part of me.”

When Bernard came in as a rookie, she found it difficult to turn her mind off soccer when

she left the facility. Creating separation between the sport and her personal life helped her flip the switch, a change evident to her teammates.

“It’s just been cool seeing her evolve because freshman year, she didn’t necessarily have a starting role,” senior defender and captain Rachel Roebuck said. “She was still very important to us, but now she’s really taken on both a leadership role spiritually for our team and now she’s a big part of our play.”

The team carries a tradition of holding Bible studies for players to grow in their faith together, a tradition that changed everything for Bernard in the spring of her freshman season. She expressed the studies resonated with her deeply, revealing she “needed this in her life.”

Upon numerous conversations, she said she decided to renew her Christian faith. Bernard said the choice revolutionized her relationship with the game.

“I have got to play soccer with a lot more freedom and peace because of my faith and how I’m motivated by God [...],” Bernard said. “My freshman year, I did not have that or really have faith like I do now. It’s definitely more fun to play when you are playing with a purpose rather than just playing and thinking of all the outside factors.”

Bernard said leaning into her faith helped her discover a calling beyond dominating athletically, a shift the upperclassmen noticed during her sophomore year. Senior defender

and fellow captain Abi Major observed this firsthand, as she now leads the weekly studies alongside Bernard.

“It’s really nice to see her come into that role these past couple of years and really bring that onto the field, into the locker room and just have that as her motivation as to the way she plays and leads,” Major said. “[She] leads by example and makes sure everyone knows they are cared for and important.”

The Heath, Texas, native has proved to be a crucial part of running the Mean Green offense. This season, she has logged four goals, four assists, 12 points and 17 shots on goal, making her the team’s current leader in four categories. In her second year as a full-time starter, Bernard has emerged as a standout player.

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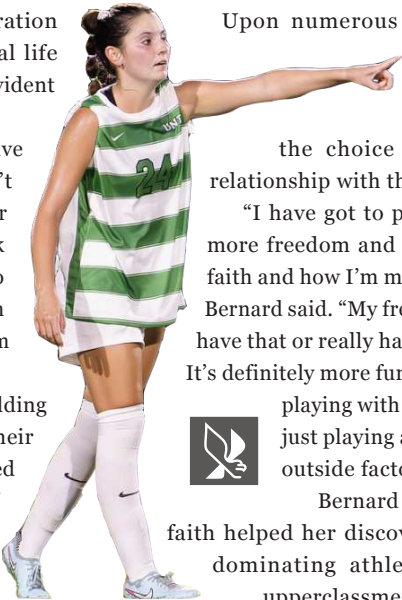


Photo by Sarah Stokes

Arts & Life

Amy Jasek shares something she ‘can’t imagine not doing’ at PolaCon 10

By Sophia Carbajal
Senior Arts & Life Writer

A dozen people lay across a blue-green, queen-size sheet on hot concrete at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios. Forty-nine-year-old photographer Amy Jasek started a 12-minute timer for the soon-to-be art piece.

Jasek quickly ran around the event space to arrange cameras, plastic watering cans, plexiglass and film cutouts onto the sheet. Wearing a cyanotype-blue dress of her own design, Jasek waited for the timer to end and lectured anyone willing to learn about the photographic process of cyanotype prints.

“I love teaching,” Jasek said. “I absolutely love doing it, and I love introducing people to this process. I’ve had people over at my house before, groups and individuals, things like that, because it’s just a gift introducing somebody to this photography.”

Initially used for creating blueprints, cyanotypes are one of the oldest kinds of analogue photography. Jasek first coated the sheet in an iron salt solution, which, when exposed to sunlight and then rinsed with water, turns into a bright blue print.

Jasek led the cyanotype demonstration at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 27, as part of PolaCon 10, a three-and-a-half-day event celebrating analogue photography. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the annual instant film photography convention.

“I’m glad that they’re into it and that



Photographer Amy Jasek gives props to PolaCon 10 attendees before her large scale cyanotype workshop at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studio on Sept. 27, 2025. **Photo by Trennt Rhea**

I’m able to go there and do this with them because I really like getting people involved in art projects in general,” Jasek said. “I really like telling people about cyanotypes because it’s a really approachable, flexible medium. You don’t have to have a lot of fancy equipment.”

Jasek’s passion for teaching others, particularly about film photography, stems from being raised by a photography-obsessed father. Jasek said she would spend hours with her dad in his darkroom, watching as

he developed print film negatives.

Jasek said her dad taught her to look for great photo subjects and to create meaning in her art.

“There’s something that he would say to me: ‘a photograph has to have something to say,’” Jasek said. “It’s like you can look at a photo and maybe the composition is good, it’s well exposed or whatever, but does it have anything to say?”

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News



Denton County adopted a \$452.2 million budget for FY25-26 which took effect on Oct. 1 and lowered the property tax rate from 18.79 cents to 18.59 cents per \$100. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Denton County adopts new budget for new fiscal year

By Kyson Barber
Staff Writer

Denton County adopted a \$452.2 million budget for the FY25-26, which took effect on Oct. 1 and lowered the property tax rate to its lowest point since 1986.

The budget, approved Sept. 9, reduces the county property tax rate from 18.79 cents to 18.59 cents per \$100 of taxable property value. The budget increase reflects an ongoing trend, as Denton County has experienced significant budget growth over the past decade.

“One of the Denton County Commissioners Court’s main goals is to keep property taxes as low as possible to cover the cost of providing the necessary services as required by state statute,” said Director of Community Relations Dawn Cobb in an email to the *North Texas Daily*.

According to Denton County’s website, the reduced rate makes the county’s property tax the second lowest among the

15 most populous Texas counties, which include Dallas County, Tarrant County and Collin County.

For a median-priced home in Denton, which is \$384,046 according to U.S. News & World Report, the reduced rate equals an annual savings of about \$7.42 on the county portion of the tax bill.

Commissioners at the Sept. 9 meeting acknowledged that, while the tax rate has dropped to its lowest level in nearly four decades, homeowners are unlikely to see significant relief as rising property values across the county mean most tax bills will remain flat or even increase, despite the lower rate.

Homeowners, such as Angela Dockery, a Denton resident and retired clinical psychologist, expressed concern about the rising cost of living, saying the slight decrease in county property taxes does not really help residents.

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North Texas Daily

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief

Gianna Ortnier-Findlay
@giannae.ortner_reports

Managing Editor

Hannah Everett
@hannah.g.everett

Design Editor

Mekielle Vaughn
@notso_meek

Digital Editor

Aiden Gonzalez
@_xiden

News Editor

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@diego_jh8

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Copyeditor

Samantha Heath
@samdoesjournalism

Faculty Advisor

Randy Loftis
940-565-3495//Randy.Loftis@unt.edu

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Denton County adopts \$452.2 million budget, lowers property tax rate to lowest rate since 1986

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“It’s a catch-22,” Dockery said. “Unfortunately, with the decrease in taxes, it doesn’t help the homeowner because of the significant increase in property values.”

According to county data, average home values jumped about 3.68 percent between FY25 and FY26.

“The county’s tax rate only represents a small portion of the overall property tax bill that property owners pay each year,” Cobb said in an email to the *Daily*. “However, we also have the homestead and over-65 exemptions in place to assist property owners. [...]”

This year’s \$452.2 million budget marks an increase of about \$35 million from the 2024-25 \$416.4 million

budget. Much of the additional spending reflects the county’s ongoing population boom.

Denton County’s population has almost doubled since 2000, climbing from about 439,056 residents to over 1 million in 2023, according to the United States Census Bureau.

Denton County is still spending as little as possible, remaining at the bottom of the top 15 counties in expenditures per capita, at \$423, Cobb said. Denton County also stays at or below the average of neighboring counties in amount spent per capita.

The budget allocates funds to several

different areas, including \$1.83 million for technology services, \$4.7 million for preventative maintenance, \$7.5 million for pay-as-you-go projects, \$11.12 million for public safety and \$5.39 million for judicial and legal divisions.

County officials said using cash instead of issuing bonds for specific projects, such as pay-as-you-go projects, reduces long-term debt

obligations and gives the county greater flexibility.

Preventive maintenance received a \$4.7 million allocation. Commissioner Precinct 2 Kevin Falconer said the maintenance funding helps the county get ahead of infrastructure needs while making efficient use of taxpayer dollars. He added that measures such as preventative maintenance are meant to save taxpayers’ money over the long run.

“This proactive approach also ensures we stay ahead of issues today as we look ahead to the needs of tomorrow,” Falconer said in a press release. County officials also

emphasized the importance of funding for employee pay and benefits. Like many local governments, Denton County faces competition in hiring and retaining workers, particularly in law enforcement, justice and public works.

“Being competitive in salaries across the board, including in law enforcement and our justice system, is key to maintaining quality services from our current employees and in attracting the best and brightest for the future,” said Commissioner Precinct 1 Ryan Williams in the press release.

The press release states the 2025-26 budget is designed to address the county’s rapid growth while keeping the tax rate low. Denton County Judge Andy Eads said the county is “preparing for the future,” which will require innovative solutions to budgeting issues.

Photo by Maria Crane



Denton City Council reviews growth fees and billing reforms as city expands

By Mollie Banstetter
Staff Writer

The Denton City Council discussed changes to the structure of the Capital Improvements Advisory Committee to meet the new requirements of the amended section of the Texas Local Government Code at a special called session on Sept. 30.

The CIAC, a state-mandated body, reviews how Denton sets, collects and spends impact fees. The fees are charged to developers to help pay for infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer systems needed for new growth.

“With those amendments, we will have to change how we conduct business going forward,” Development Review Manager Angie Manglaris said during the meeting. “So staff is seeking direction on the establishment of a new CIAC, including membership requirements, term lengths and number of members on the committee.”

The change is required by Senate Bill 1883, which orders cities to establish independent CIACs with at least half of them made up of developers, representatives from the building industry or real estate professionals. This mandates the city to shift away from using its Planning and Zoning Commission for the role. Denton must adopt an ordinance to dissolve the old arrangement and create the new committee.

City staff presented a draft ordinance that would dissolve the current arrangement and create a new committee

with staggered four-year terms. Suzi Rumohr, Mayor Pro Tem and a former librarian at Texas Woman’s University, supported the recommendation, calling staggered terms important for continuity during the meeting.

“I do like the four-year term lengths, knowing that this group has long-term projects they are working on,” Rumohr said. “I agree with the staggering terms so we don’t have too much turnover at the same time.”

Mayor Gerard Hudspeth stated during the meeting that he believes the extraterritorial jurisdiction members of the committee should know Denton. Hudspeth disagrees with the staff recommendation that the ETJ members must be residents at the time of application to qualify for the role.

“Before you start making decisions, you should at least come here, have lunch, visit a coffee shop,” Hudspeth said.

Vicki Byrd, Council member and TWU alumna, stated her belief that members representing the city’s ETJ should be older than the staff recommendation.

“I would also suggest that we bring on someone who is at least 21 years old,” Byrd said in the meeting. “I’m not really sure what an 18-year-old can bring to the table [...] but I would prefer someone who’s a more mature age.”

Brandon McGee, Council member and Texas A&M alumnus, opposed the three-year increase on the age requirement, saying 18-year-olds should be eligible.



Mayor Gerard Hudspeth takes notes during the special called session on Sept. 30, 2025.

Photo by Marcella Lunardini

“In this country, we send 18-year-olds to give their life for the rest of us,” McGee said during the meeting. “Who am I to tell an 18-year-old they can’t participate in the city process if they want to?”

In a separate work session item, the Council reviewed the evaluation of billing practices conducted by the Ascent Group, a utility consulting company hired by the city. The review compared Denton’s practices to those of peer utilities across the state and region.

According to staff, Denton performs better than many other cities in collecting outstanding payments, but still has opportunities to improve fairness and customer service.

Staff recommended faster deposit

refunds when accounts are closed, shortening the time customers wait to receive their money back.

They also suggested looser restrictions on payment arrangements to give more flexibility to customers who fall behind on bills, as well as expanded eligibility for leak adjustments to provide relief when abnormally high water bills result from leaks.

Staff notes that the proposed changes would make billing more flexible while still ensuring the city maintains stable revenues to fund utility operations. They said both the CIAC ordinance and the utility billing policy changes will return to the Council for action in the coming months.



Jasek showcases to attendees cyanotype creation at PolaCon 10 demonstration

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Jasek has been engaging with cyanotypes for years as a member of Shootapalooza, a photography group founded in 2014. Members of Shootapalooza created World Cyanotype Day, which takes place every year on the last Saturday of September, to celebrate the traditional medium.

On the first-ever World Cyanotype Day on Sept. 19, 2015, photographers and art lovers gathered in Johnson City and created, at the time, the world's largest cyanotype on a 30-foot-wide and 90-foot-long sheet. Since then, Jasek has led several demonstrations at PolaCon for people of all ages to create the medium at more manageable sizes.

Daniel Rodrigue is an adjunct professor at the university and the co-founder of the Instant Film Society, the local organization that created PolaCon in 2015. By the third year of PolaCon, Rodrigue sought out artists who could showcase various types of photography, such as cyanotypes.

This year, Rodrigue said he made a conscious effort to celebrate cyanotypes through artists like Jasek so the community can be a part of the process.

"There's obviously kind of a wow factor because the bigger it is, the more people that can be a part of it," Rodrigue said. "The bigger it is, the more hands and arms and earrings and whatnot, the more people really get to be a part of it forever."

Although Jasek said that her dad had a major influence on her early life, it was not until her early 20s that she created a photo that would spark her lifelong passion. While traveling to Rome in 2002, Jasek took a picture of two nuns sitting on a bus in a moment of spontaneity.

The black and white film turned out



Photographer Amy Jasek poses with the finished large scale cyanotype project during PolaCon 10 at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studio on Sept. 27, 2025. **Photo by Trennt Rhea**

exactly how she had pictured it. Jasek describes this photo as the moment she knew she wanted to be a photographer for life.

Jasek said she almost always gravitates towards instant film photography over digital photography. Like the unpredictability of cyanotypes, Jasek said the natural imperfections in film photos are more interesting to her than the digital effects she can create using editing software.

"I have a really good digital camera, like a full-frame monster that makes beautiful pictures that I use for professional work," Jasek said. "Even if it renders the color beautifully, I just feel

like it's not the same. Something is lacking there for me."

Amber Taylor-Lucas, a 40-year-old Plano photographer, attended Jasek's cyanotype demonstration because of her love of analogue photography. Taylor-Lucas also participated in Jasek's 2024 PolaCon demonstration, but this year she decided to place her Polaroid Go Instant Camera on the cyanotype instead.

Taylor-Lucas said she prefers film photography over digital photography because of the unpredictability of film photos. She loves the collaborative process of film photography because the minor inconsistencies in analog photos force her to relinquish control to the camera.

"As someone who thrives on certainty, it helps me kind of break out of that and be more flexible and just see what happens," Taylor-Lucas said. "Seeing what happens is where the magic is to me."

Jasek said events like World Cyanotype Day and PolaCon give the small instant film photographers community a chance to feel less alone and connect over their shared passions. The artist said she will never stop being a photographer.

"I can't imagine not doing photography, I really can't, even if I'm completely broke and can't buy film anymore," Jasek said. "I can't imagine not doing it, because it's just part of me and it's always been part of me."

DENTON HAUNTS Ghost Walk

When: Friday, Oct. 3 at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Downtown Denton Square

What: DENTON HAUNTS Ghost Tour is an hour-and-a-half-long walking tour of the downtown Denton Square with Denton ghost stories, local history and hidden secrets from the town's past. Meetup is at Capt. John B. Denton's grave on the historic Courthouse lawn every Friday and Saturday in October at 7:30 p.m. The event is rated PG-13 for occasional details, language and topics. Register via Eventbrite to guarantee a spot.

Hilarity Theater's Pumpkin Spice Laughter Improv Show

When: Saturday, Oct. 4 at 7 p.m.

Where: North Central Texas College Black Box Theater, 316 E Hickory St.

What: Completely unscripted and fueled by audience suggestions, no two performances of this show are ever the same. North Central Texas College says the improv-focused event is perfect for a date night, a family outing or a fun night with friends.

The Devil Made Me Do It

When: Tuesday, Oct. 7 at 5 p.m.

Where: Hemlock Fox, 116 N. Austin St.

What: Hemlock Fox is continuing their month-long trek through "The Conjuring" and have finally arrived at "The Conjuring 2" (2016). They invite attendees to watch Ed and Lorraine Warren fight demons while sipping custom cocktails inspired by the characters. A themed vendor will be set up with oddities, art, jewelry and candy artworks. Attendees can also "adopt-a-demon" that has been carefully crafted or adopt a doll that may or may not be haunted from Hemlock Fox co-owner, Elizabeth Bernal, aka Woolen Witch Crafts.

PolaCon 10 brings the town of 'Twin Peaks' to Denton

By Shehzil Imran
News Editor

A red velvet curtain is pulled away to reveal a fog-filled room decorated with blue roses, fake owls and a singular statue replicating the Venus de Milo sculpture, sitting on top of a zig-zag rug.

On the other side of the wall, the blaring vocals and instruments of local bands SEVIT and MOMWOW fill the room.

The stark contrast in settings is a part of "Photos from a Black Lodge: A 'Twin Peaks' Celebration," which took place on Sept. 27 at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studio. The event celebrated 35 years of the television show "Twin Peaks" (1990), in tandem with the 10th annual Denton instant film convention, PolaCon.

"I think that [this is] on the surface level of what brings us together, it's just more the visual aesthetic," said Kayla Plunkett, attendee and Dallas resident. "But I think it's more that there's a like-mindedness for people who love David Lynch and love 'Twin Peaks.' There's just a shared connection."

The themed night was one of three Rubber Gloves events part of PolaCon, organized by the Instant Film Society.

Created by surrealist filmmaker David Lynch, "Twin Peaks" follows the murder of teenager Laura Palmer in a small town, provoking an investigation that reveals darker secrets than the death of one girl. The '90s show gained immediate popularity upon airing, amassing over 30 million views on its first episode alone, mainly due to the eccentric, dreamlike atmosphere the storyline and characters create — a combination signature of Lynch's films.

"I like that I can never figure out what's going to happen next," Plunkett said. "It's so rich and it's such a neat story that, in many ways, is grounded in reality. It's just a small town and a diner and a murder, right?"

But then it just goes off in these wild directions."

The mystical night began with a magic show by magician Confetti Eddie, who performed tricks such as making stacks of money appear from pieces of green tissue paper, as well as making objects disappear and reappear.

In addition to opening the show with magic, the event hosted a music lineup from 7-11 p.m., consisting of Lily Taylor, a vocalist and BandwithTX radio show host, as well as bands SEVIT, Deep Red and MOMWOW.

The second band to play, SEVIT, was formed in 2017 as a new wave, post-punk group, but underwent a change in its current member lineup in 2022, transitioning to synth and dark wave genres.

The "Twin Peaks" celebration was the group's first time playing at Rubber Gloves.

"I've always wanted to play at Rubber Gloves," said Maddie Fritz, a SEVIT band member and university master's student. "It's definitely been awesome, and it's definitely been a long time coming. I mean, everyone here has been super sweet, [...] it's just really nice to see the community come out and support each other in Denton."

Fritz said she believes Lynch's works, such as "Twin Peaks," his debut feature film "Eraserhead" (1977) and "Blue Velvet" (1986) are captivating in terms of soundtrack, cinematography and "weirdness" in storytelling. She credits Lynch as one of her and the band's influences.

"A lot of our lyrical topics can be a little dark," Fritz said. "And so I think he's kind of inspired me to be able to be weird and strange and dark in your art and not be afraid to just let that part of you be shown in your creative endeavors."

Continuing with the TV show's theme, the event arranged the venue's Rubber Room to replicate the Black Lodge, a sinister alternate dimension frequently visited in the show, allowing attendees to sit in cushion chairs and have their photos taken in the iconic space.

The recreated Black Lodge held a dance set by Rob



Attendees sit posed for a photo in the "Twin Peaks" themed room at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios during PolaCon 10 on Sept. 27, 2025.

Photo by Brendan McDonald

Buttrum, who went by DJ DreamLover69 for the late-night portion of the event from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Before Buttrum's set, he played music from Lynch's films, such as "Laura Palmer's Theme" from "Twin Peaks," "In Heaven (Lady in the Radiator Song)" from "Eraserhead" and Roy Orbison's "In Dreams" from "Blue Velvet."

"[The show] is one of the all-time greatest," Buttrum said. "The mood, tension, the mystery, the certainty, just everything that you want out of something that you're going to keep watching."

Buttrum has been with PolaCon since its inception, either DJing, performing live or presenting at the event. He said it has been awesome to watch the convention grow throughout the past decade.

"Denton has a good photography slash instant film scene already," Buttrum said. "So it's cool just to see outsiders also coming in and seeing it."

In the first episode of "Twin Peaks," Dale Cooper sits down at the town's local diner and enjoys a piece of pie and a "damn fine cup of coffee." In addition to live music and "Twin Peaks" themed photo opportunities, attendees celebrated the series with a slice of cherry pie and a cup of coffee.

The scene, like the rest of the show, has remained iconic and memorable since its release, Fritz said.

With the show turning 35 this year, the event provided a chance for "Twin Peaks" fans, such as Taylor, to celebrate what made the series special to them.

"David Lynch is not for everybody," Taylor said. "That's important, we need people to remind us of the surreal aspects of life. [...] I think that it's a way to express a bit of humanity that's not so baked like a cake [...] it's not so predictable and reminds us that we can be unpredictable, we can be creative, we can be weirdos and that's okay."

Photos by Brendan McDonald and Trennt Rhea

Doja Cat to ‘come back’ to life, blends mix of ‘80s inspiration and love of pop in ‘Vie’

By Aiden Gonzalez
Digital Editor

Just over two years after calling her fourth album, “Scarlet” (2023) a “massive fart,” hip-hop artist Doja Cat returns to her pop music roots with her 2025 studio album, “Vie.”

Heavily inspired by the retro sounds of the ‘80s, her newest French romance-inspired project, released on Sept. 26, focuses on themes of “love, romance, and sex.” Vie, a French word translating to “life” in English, features 15 tracks with a runtime of just under 50 minutes, making it her shortest album yet, but it does not disappoint.

The project opens with a captivating saxophone melody in “Cards,” which sets the tone for what is to come. With lyrics like “Play your cards right,” Doja Cat cleverly alludes to the themes of decision-making and the risks that can lead to rewards.

After lighting up the 2025 MTV Video Music Awards, lead single “Jealous Type” surges with a magnetic mix of pop-funk. Doja Cat’s bold lyrics make it clear she will not bend for anyone, flaunting her self-assurance with lines like “No girl enjoys trying to tough it out for a party boy.” The song closes with a sky-high piano note that resonates into the ether, sealing its authentic disco feel.

Track three, “AAAHH MEN!,” boldly celebrates refusing to settle. Sampling the iconic 1982 show “Knight Rider” into theme, the song bursts with retro flair and features a biting rap verse at its core. The clever title twists the phrase “amen” into “ah men,” reflecting Doja Cat’s cheeky wordplay.



Illustration by Kaitlyn Kampschneider

With punchy lines like “And I have too much tolerance, you ugly and fine as s—,” it makes it clear she is not tolerating nonsense. The more notable lyric, “When you’re finished with your g–n sesh, join me at church,” is a prime example of Doja Cat’s creative lyricism.

The fifth track, “Gorgeous,” fuses Doja Cat’s catchy hit song “Say So” (2019) with a fresh, unexpected rap edge. The second verse opens with similar lyrics to “Attention,” repeating the line “look at me, really look at me,” but delivers them with a softer touch this time, beckoning the listener to take a closer look.

Much like “Say So,” “Gorgeous” circles back to the line, “It’s a crime to be gorgeous,” with Doja Cat wanting to spotlight the message that self-love is essential. Through this playful language, she urges everyone to know that “We make a killing being so beautiful,” all while a lively ‘80s-inspired saxophone jazz vibe weaves the chorus and message together seamlessly.

“All Mine,” being one of Doja Cat’s favorite songs from the project, starts with a sample of a scene from “A View to Kill” (1985), asking what to do when someone attracts a man. This track is nothing short of that. Contradicting her own message in “AAAHH MEN!,” the themes of “All Mine” are desire and confidence in a romantic relationship.

Pouring her soul into every note, Doja Cat delivers lines like “Wanting what we want” and “You’re all mine, boy,” adding the perfect finishing touch of passion and intimacy.

Of course, it could not be a Doja Cat album without a song featuring R&B artist SZA. “Take Me Dancing,” featuring SZA, is the only song on the project that features another artist. This track is a perfect example of a feel-good song. SZA steps in with a standout verse, her vocals effortlessly gliding into a fresh new beat that elevates the track and keeps the energy pulsing.

When listening to “Take Me Dancing,” the listener can picture bright red roller skates gliding across the floor, a disco ball reflecting colorful lights overhead, infusing the dance floor with cheerful disco-colored energy.

Track 11, “Acts of Service,” radiates the same dreamy, slow-burning romantic energy found in “Agora Hills,” from her “Scarlet” album, wrapping her words in a warm, love-drenched feeling.

Next up in track 12, “Make it Up” lives up to its name, centering the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation within a relationship. Describing herself as a “submissive top,” Doja Cat expresses her willingness to make up and fix what is broken.

Not to be forgotten is the French throughline throughout the project. Songs such as “Lipstain” and “Happy” add a unique international vibe, making it stand out even more. A lyric worth mentioning is “Tu es ma vie et mon tout,” which translates to “You are my life and everything,” perfectly connecting the heartfelt emotion and romantic essence of the album.

Coming to a close with an emotional turn, “Come Back” captures yearning for a lost connection. Doja Cat’s heartfelt repetition of “Come back to me, come back” floats over a silky R&B backdrop, exposing her vulnerability and desire to revive a love that slipped away.

With an album title of “Vie,” Doja Cat hits the mark once again, infusing life with a soul-stirring groove of retro hope and the kind of love everyone dreams of.

Aiden’s rating: 5/5

Icon of the Week:

Bad Bunny



Credit Eric Rojas

The *Daily’s* icon of the week is Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, known by his artist name Bad Bunny, for the recent announcement on Sept. 28 that he will headline the 2026 Super Bowl halftime show.

Bad Bunny is known for his blend of trap and reggaeton genres, notably being named the “King of Latin Trap” and the “Best Latin Rapper of All Time” by GQ and Forbes.

Born on March 10, 1994, and raised in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, he grew up singing in his church choir weekly until he was 13 years old. At 14, he uploaded his first single to the streaming platform SoundCloud. Three years later, he reached No. 19 on the Hot Latin Songs chart.

After this breakout success, he went on to do songs with famous hip-hop artist Drake, among other stars, and in 2020, Bad Bunny’s third solo studio album, “El Último Tour Del Mundo,” became the first all-Spanish spoken album to top the Billboard 200.

Bad Bunny has won three Grammy awards and has additionally received nine Grammy-award nominations throughout his nearly 13 year career, including having the first Spanish-language album to be nominated for album of the year in 2023.

Skate. fails to ride high as the latest entry in the series crashes spectacularly

By Jake Wilkinson
Staff Writer

After more than four years in development, skate. is now being released into early access. It is safe to say the franchise’s newest entry has been wiped out before it ever got the board rolling.

Skate., developed by Full Circle and some original members of the Skate development

team, fails spectacularly in reviving the soul of the older titles. Published by EA, it is positioned as an online-only, live-service and free-to-play title aiming to attract a new audience of young skaters. The game is in early access, and its unfinished state is evident from the start.

Skate. feels soulless and corporate compared to its iconic predecessor. During the early 2010s, when Skate 3 was initially released, the legendary Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater franchise

entered a grim fate, as the fifth entry in the series failed to meet the expectations of critics and fans.

Skate 3, as well as the first two entries, had a more realistic art direction, satirical comedy and absolutely hilarious ragdoll physics. Skate 3 was a refined, grounded and fun video game. Skate. by comparison, is everything the series should not be.

Skate. thankfully gets one thing right, and that is its core gameplay. Skateboarding is charming in its simplicity, thanks to the new modern controls, but if players want the challenge of the older games in the series, the title graciously lets veterans return to the classic button layout.

With tricks like the classic coffin to the spread eagle when soaring off a building, skate. includes the core of what makes Skate great, but it is everything surrounding the game that hurts it the most.

Skate. lost its charm by going for a more cartoony and bland art style. The art style is akin to games like Fortnite (2017) or Valorant (2020), particularly in the character creator portion of the game.

When looking at the game, players will not see the Skate they know, but a generic game that falls short of its predecessors’ hard-edged art style, one that was grainy and cutthroat. A different art style is not limited to the game characters, but can also be seen in the playground the game sets players loose in, San Vansterdam.

The city in the game is lifeless. In past titles, the maps had style and memorable landmarks

players would recognize, such as Skate 3’s Super Ultra Mega Park, which are nowhere to be seen.

For the city’s environment, Full Circle has seemingly left it up to the player base to add depth to the game’s singular location. With the only objects featured in San Vansterdam being those left behind by other players, and aside from a few hollow challenges and a random store selling virtual clothes for fake currency, the city is populated only with non-player characters designed to get in the way.

Skate has always been known for its plentiful side activities, like the Hall of Meat, in which players try to break as many bones in the avatar’s body as possible to achieve the target score, or Death Races, where players race through a course as quickly as possible.

The lack of these modes makes skate. not feel like itself anymore. As an early access game with live service elements, it is clear that EA plans to introduce these iconic modes later and attempt to generate additional revenue from players seeking more from the game.

Skate. is the final nail in the coffin for the series, long before it even finishes development, from its bland art style to an open world that is as shallow as a puddle.

Skate. will roll into the live service graveyard alongside all the other attempts to little fanfare, and it is a shame to see this titan crash and burn.

Jake’s rating: 1.5/5



Illustration by Thomas Trevino

Bernard serves as crucial part of the captain’s unit

BERNARD continued from page 1

“She sees things that most players don’t see, and she normally sets up our offense,” head coach John Hedlund said. “She’s a kid that we need in there the majority of the game. I try to give her a breather, but the tough part is when you pull a kid like that out, you’re going to dip a little bit in your play.”

Hedlund’s scheme places Bernard in a true offensive midfielder role, orchestrating the attack and setting the tempo. Similar to a point guard in basketball, the position requires being the most communicative and having a desire to understand what makes their teammates click.

It is a role Bernard assumed, not just from a play standpoint. She has a hand in cultivating the team’s culture, a grasp that has only improved with time in a North Texas uniform.

Spiritual development is not the only factor that steered Bernard’s metamorphosis as a player. She said she recalls a specific moment in her freshman year when Hedlund pulled her into his office to emphasize trust in her abilities, a trust he felt Bernard needed in her.

“I’m super confident in a place where I’m comfortable, and so it was hard for me to become confident in a new team, a new setting and a new style of play,” Bernard said. “I feel like [Hedlund and I] are close because of how much he believes in me.”

Hilarious, joyful and honest are traits Hedlund uses to define his youngest captain. Opening up to him and the team more year after year, her



Junior midfielder Mia Bernard dribbles up the field against Charlotte at the Soccer and Track & Field Stadium on Sept. 25, 2025.

Photo by Marcella Lunardini

personality has helped her nurture intentional relationships across the program.

“She’s kind of like a daughter to me,” Hedlund said. “We can talk about soccer [and] life in general. She’s just a great role model for the team. We just connect, and you can’t say that about all the players.”

Hedlund made it clear that hoisting a conference championship trophy alongside Bernard is high on his to-do list. He said her leadership has become increasingly important recently, as the team currently posts a 4-8-1 record.

Alongside her co-captains, Bernard said she is determined to make her head coach’s dream a reality. Due to a newfound perspective, she said she is flourishing at the right time and at a moment where her captaincy could serve as a catalyst for change.

“We have been working so hard for it not to become the outcome we want,” Bernard said. “We have so much talent on our team that when we work together, we’re that good. It’s going to click eventually. It has to.”

Athlete of the Week:

Caleb Hawkins



Credit Mean Green Sports

After a four-touchdown day against Army (1-3, 0-2 American Conference) on Sept. 20, freshman running back Caleb Hawkins followed up his breakout performance with another just a week later. Hawkins rushed 16 times for 140 yards on Sept. 27, an average of 8.8 yards per carry and finished with three total touchdowns. He also recorded 78 receiving yards, including a 68-yard screen pass he caught on a third-and-15 and took into the end zone for a touchdown. On the ground, his two rushing touchdowns tied him for fifth place among all Football Bowl Subdivision players in total rushing touchdowns with seven. Hawkins also tied for first in rushing scores among all FBS freshmen, with first-year Oregon (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) running back Jordon Davison. In the year, Hawkins has 307 rushing yards on 42 attempts in four appearances, with North Texas’ (5-0, 2-0 American) next game coming up on Oct. 10 at 6 p.m. against the University of South Florida (3-1, 0-0 American).



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Sophomore outside hitter Reagan Bedell leads North Texas volleyball in kills amid hot start to season

By Carson Kelly
Staff Writer

Up two sets to one, the University of Texas at Arlington was on the precipice of defeating the Mean Green volleyball team. The score reading 24-23 with UTA in the lead, Mavericks redshirt junior outside hitter Sophie Ocampo leapt up for the match-sealing kill.

Stonewalling the ball above the net, sophomore outside hitter Reagan Bedell equalized the set at 24 apiece. From there, the team kept the momentum going, taking the lead on the next play with a kill once again from Bedell.

North Texas won the set, tied the match at 2-2 and never trailed a single time in the fifth and final set to win the game 3-2. All of which started with a singular Bedell block.

“There’s just such a rush playing that game and going 24-24 and having that block,” Bedell said. “It was just an awesome moment.”

The team already has 11 wins on the year in just 14 games, one more win than they had the entirety of last season. The record coincides with the arrival of head coach Dave Fleming, who spent 20 years at Division II Colorado Mesa University.

Among other moments throughout this season, Fleming said the block fueling a momentum-filled fifth set showed the belief his team has and their potential as a group.

“UTA had a match point against us, and she had a stuff block, and the way we reacted in set five, you coach long enough where you know ‘Hey, this could be a special group,’” Fleming said.

As a leader of the group, Bedell has helped the team’s new eight players adjust to the university.



Sophomore outside hitter Reagan Bedell waits for the serve by Charlotte at the UNT Volleyball Center on Sept. 26, 2025. **Photo by Katie Brackens**

Freshman setter Sidney Soria said the team played a significant role in helping her adjust to the university as one of its leaders.

“They have done a great job of being welcoming and pushing me to be better and also being a better human being,” Soria said. “I love them so much.”

Bedell led the team in kills with 17 in the Sept. 14 win against UTA, something she has been familiar with this season. She leads the team in total kills and kills per set with 177 and 3.47, respectively, a feat even Fleming said he was shocked by.

“If you told me that she was going to be our kill leader, even when I first stepped on campus, I would have said ‘No way,’” Fleming said. “I always thought she was going to be a rock for us. She proved that to me when I first got to campus, but I had no idea we were going to get this production out of her.”

For Bedell, the arrival of Fleming and the new teammates represented an opportunity to shake off a turbulent freshman season, during which she experienced inconsistent playing time and started in only six games.

Bedell said she felt she had the chance to “rebrand [herself] in a way” after a losing 10-18 season and playing in only 45 sets, ranking 11th out of 17 available players. She recorded 70 kills in those 45 sets, averaging 1.56 kills per set. The lack of statistical contribution and confidence last season could not be more different from her production today.

“Last fall I had a moment where I did play a good amount and then there’s a streak where I didn’t play a lot and it messed with my confidence a little bit,” Bedell said. “I just remember talking to my parents a lot and being like ‘I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.’”

Since taking on a larger role, Bedell has more than doubled her 70 kills from her freshman year already, with 177 in just six more sets than she played all last season.

The new additions have helped the program improve from 10 total wins last year to 11 in just 14 games this year, with Bedell showcasing the rebranding she adopted in the offseason.

Fleming said Bedell displaying her abilities in game-time moments is one of the hitter’s greatest strengths.

He added that an observer watching Bedell just practice, they would only say she is just a “good” outside hitter. Yet, Fleming said that when she steps onto the court with the lights at their brightest, she becomes great.

“I think what she does really well is [that] she is a gamer,” Fleming said. “The bigger the moment, the bigger she plays.”

At a Glance:

Volleyball

Mean Green volleyball (11-3, 1-1 American Conference) started American Conference play with an up-and-down 1-1 record, and will travel to Florida Atlantic University (10-5, 1-1 American) for a conference match on Oct. 3 at 6 p.m. So far this season, North Texas has surpassed its win total from last year of 10 and tied its three away wins from last season. North Texas’ next game will be streamed on ESPN+ as they play on the road.

Softball

Despite not starting its season until the spring, North Texas softball will hit Lovelace Stadium for its first fall game on Oct. 1 at 5 p.m. and play its first fall away game at North Central Texas College in Gainesville, Texas, on Oct. 8 at 6 p.m. None of the fall games will be recorded as wins or losses, and neither will any produce stats, but it will be the first opportunity for fans to see the new Mean Green team under first-year head coach Cody White, who arrives from the University of Central Oklahoma.

Swim & Dive

North Texas swim and dive will both compete on Oct. 3 at the SMU Invite held by Southern Methodist University at 3 p.m. after the swim team began its season at the Sam Freas Invite on Sept. 27. In the dive team’s first taste of competition, the team returns seven divers, losing former Mean Green diver Mackenzie Ferguson to graduation. Among its returners, the dive team will have several proven available divers at its disposal, including the conference’s Most Outstanding Diver last season in senior Kamryn Wong.

University’s club baseball team continues to grow while Division I conversations remain stagnant

By Rolando Medina
Staff Writer

North Texas and NCAA baseball have struggled to work in tandem since the Mean Green last fielded a team in 1988. Alumni-led groups have garnered support in reviving the program.

The Division I program originally lasted five seasons before it was disbanded to comply with Title IX, a federal law preventing sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs and activities.

Baseball reverted to its roots as a club sport. Junior Eli Melnick has now become the current president of the university’s baseball club, adding to the history of the school’s oldest and only baseball team.

“Club sports is such a cool thing that I never knew anything about,” Melnick said. “I mean, just wearing the jerseys,

wearing the merch [...], it’s awesome to have that connection to the school.”

Melnick said the club, which competes in the National Club Baseball Association, aims to prioritize the enjoyment of the game without the fear of failure. He also said it gives students another opportunity to compete and display their passion for America’s pastime.

Those qualities of the club instilled by its former players are something Melnick enjoyed when he joined in his freshman year, 2023. After playing high school baseball in Illinois, he joined the club in his freshman year after being approached in the dining hall by members of the club and has stayed since.

“When I was a freshman, it was cool because there wasn’t a dynamic where there’s guys on the team that are above and guys that are below,” Melnick said. “I came out to the first few games, and my love for the game was just instantly back.”

Sophomore club secretary Brayden Crockett similarly said he believes passion is what has allowed the student-run organization to stay around for so long.

“It’s purely for the love of the game,” Crockett said. “I don’t think there’s a single group of guys who are willing to go 0-for-4, have a bad game and drive themselves all the way back [...], just to go to class the next day.”

Crockett grew up spending most of his Saturdays in Denton. His father, who has worked in Denton for over 30 years, would sit with him in the crowd of green and white, cheering on the Mean Green football team.

Crockett was able to see firsthand what it meant to represent the university, but it was not until he got older that he realized his interest in sports could not apply to a DI baseball team at the university.

“I was so invested in UNT that I was almost baffled when I realized they didn’t have a baseball team,” Crockett said.

While the reality of fielding an American Conference baseball team seems closer than ever for the club, the timeline is still uncertain. Jared Mosley, vice president and director of athletics, took to X on Sept. 22 to answer an array of questions regarding university athletics.

Of the questions directed at Mosley, one account was curious about whether a DI baseball team would be feasible in the next decade.

“Baseball is more likely to happen once we get our support facilities adequate to serve more student-athletes,” Mosley posted. “Athletic Center Expansion Phase 1 and 2 need to be complete. Depends on how long that takes us to complete fundraising for phase 2.”

In a separate tweet, Mosley confirmed the completion of Phase 1, with the

university hoping to break ground on the project in early 2026.

The club’s reputation has resonated with players and supporters alike, as it is the only baseball team representing the Mean Green. Melnick said the club’s roster numbers have been trending upward in recent years, and before this season, the club held tryouts for 60 potential players, compared to 40 last year.

Just like with any club sport, however, Minnick said the financial resources to sustain a full season are expectedly minuscule compared to a sanctioned sport.

He said funds received from annual fundraisers and donations are allocated toward the team’s traveling expenses, uniforms, equipment and other related costs. Additionally, he mentioned the team has to rent baseball fields for both home games and weekly practices.

While the club receives funding from UNT Recreational Sports, players feel that there is a sizable difference that is covered by outside support.

“Frankly, [the school’s funding will] never be enough,” Melnick said. “They can’t afford to cover our expenses for the whole season because baseball is an expensive sport. We definitely do need donations to stay afloat.”

While the discussion of bringing DI baseball back to the university will continue for years to come, the Mean Green baseball club hopes people will realize that the sport never left.

“Guys have that dream of playing in college and then life happens,” Melnick said. “Being able to come out here and have club baseball revitalize that for you really gives me a lot of pride.”



North Texas club baseball players (from left to right) Brayden Crockett, Eli Melnick and Joseph Oliphant pose for a photo outside of DATCU Stadium on Sept. 17, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Amid shifting perceptions, journalists must return to basics to revive integrity through honest reporting

By Caitlyn Ybarra
Staff Writer

Now more than ever reporters are constantly navigating polarized political climates, shrinking newsrooms and increased media restrictions.

For journalists to continue fulfilling their purpose of informing society and playing a role in the checks and balances systems of their local communities, they must make a significant shift back to journalism basics.

A journalist's role is simple: to seek truth and report it. The career of journalism is so vital to society that it is protected in the United States Constitution.

However, due to shifting views on journalism and a declining trust in the media, more obstacles for reporting and the protection of journalists are no longer straightforward.

With the White House limiting who can interview President Donald Trump and journalists facing new restrictions on reporting from inside the Pentagon, even when information is unclassified, it is clear the field is changing.

According to a Pew Research survey, honesty is the trait Americans value most from their news providers. Therefore, rebuilding trust and credibility would be an important first step in adapting to today's media landscape.

Rather than merely brushing the surface of complex or controversial topics, journalists should delve deeper and capture multiple viewpoints. Doing so would demonstrate a commitment to accuracy and objectivity – two cornerstones of ethical journalism.

A Gallup poll reported 31 percent of Americans express a “great deal” or “fair amount” of confidence that the media will report the news fairly, fully and accurately, making it evident a change is needed.

In a recent spinoff of the show “The Office” (2005-2013), called “The Paper” (2025), a disappearing Midwestern newspaper soon became one of Ohio's best with a change in leadership and a return to journalistic fundamentals.

Reporters were tasked with finding a basic journalistic concept, the Five W's – identifying and answering the who, what, when, where and why of a story – and then sent into the community to find real stories.

Coupled with comic relief, the mockumentary-style show highlighted why freedom of the press still matters. This was achieved by showcasing what journalists do best: uncovering corruption and finding overlooked stories for the greater good.

In a short time, the fictional characters were able to overcome their lack of experience and resources by harnessing their natural curiosity to question what was happening around them in the city. The newsroom also utilized the basic journalistic skills they learned to properly pursue stories.

While doing so, the staff exposed scams and revealed the truth behind some local power holders, all while balancing persistence, ethics and the financial strain of newsrooms today.

According to Free Press Unlited, a UNESCO report found that a lack of funding affects the quality of information by reducing journalists' ability to undertake investigative work and extensive research. Despite facing the same financial issues that many real-world newsrooms encounter, the characters are compelled to persevere.

Every day, real-world journalists face similar processes and struggles.

From local papers closing their doors to national outlets like the Los Angeles Times announcing more layoffs, today's journalists are being asked to cover more stories with fewer resources, all while under constant pressure to generate clicks.

Nevertheless, like the reporters of the show's newspaper, the Toledo Truth Teller, they continue working tirelessly to make a difference while upholding fundamental journalistic values.

Today's journalists are challenged by being restricted and silenced, as evidenced by the Associated Press' current inability to report on certain White House events. The Trump administration barred AP for not addressing the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America. AP has since had its access reinstated, although it remains unreliable for limited spaces like the Oval Office and Air Force One.

Press freedoms are protected under the First Amendment, but as the current presidential administration increasingly

compromises these freedoms, journalists must remain resilient and remember the importance of journalistic values.

Reporting is a process of persistence and trust, and is not as simple as asking a few questions. Journalists easily spend hours combing through public records and requesting documents, just to verify a single claim.

Building up relationships with sources also takes time, and one poorly timed or overly aggressive question could close doors that took years to open. For example, a local government reporter might spend months developing a relationship with a city official, knowing that being a smiling face today could lead to a critical on-the-record interview later.

These are all fundamental journalistic lessons the “The Paper's” reporters have to learn through training, experience and plenty of mistakes, just the same as emerging real-world journalists.

While there are moments of excitement, real-world journalists, just as the “The Paper's” newsroom comes to find out, do not do it for themselves. They do not insert personal opinions or frame certain views in a specific light. They gather facts, provide context and trust the audience to decide for themselves.

Like “The Paper's” reporters, all journalists can do amid shifting perceptions of media is stay true to their mission, which was taught to them in their journalistic training. By doing so, they can slowly but surely rebuild trust and remind readers why their work – and their honesty – still matters.



Illustration by Addyson Marsicano

The Federal Communications Commission should not make decisions based on political pressure

By Robert Trevino
Staff Writer

President Donald Trump's appointed Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr infringed on First Amendment rights by restricting statements made by late-night comedy host Jimmy Kimmel.

The FCC should not threaten networks or comedians for jokes made about the Trump administration, his followers in the “Make America Great Again” movement or alleged Republican supporters.

Kimmel's late-night show, “Jimmy Kimmel Live!,” was indefinitely suspended on Sept. 17 after he made jokes about the shooter who assassinated Republican political commentator Charlie Kirk, as well as jokes about Trump.

The jokes were lukewarm at best, with Kimmel saying, “He's at the fourth stage of grief, construction,” referencing Trump's comments about the new White House ballroom construction when asked about how he is grieving the loss of Kirk.

What got Kimmel in trouble was his commentary about the shooter who killed Kirk during an event at Utah Valley University. He claimed the “MAGA gang” was desperately trying to paint the shooter as “anything other than one of them.”

According to The Associated Press, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr released a statement on Fox News two days after Kimmel's opening monologue, stating broadcasters with FCC licenses have “a unique obligation to operate in the public interest.” He later added that Kimmel appeared to be “making an intentional effort to

mislead the public” toward the political support of Kirk's shooter.

Carr, while not directly taking action against The Walt Disney Co. or ABC, issued a threat familiar to those who have ever watched a mob film.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way,” Carr said on a podcast, adding that if no action is taken, then there will be “additional work for the FCC ahead.”

The language Carr used revealed a lack of professionalism and intolerance towards public-facing figures expressing their opinions.

After Carr's original statements, Disney and ABC caved, deciding to take Kimmel's show off air once ABC affiliate Nexstar sided with the FCC, but have now returned to broadcasting Kimmel's show.

Despite the original indefinite suspension, the show was reinstated and returned to ABC on Sept. 23, but two ABC affiliates still will not air the show. The affiliates, Sinclair and Nexstar, have not yet committed to airing the late-night show. Sinclair, a company that owns 35 ABC stations across the country, said “discussions with ABC are ongoing as we evaluate the show's potential return,” opting to show news programming instead.

“Continuing to give Mr. Kimmel a broadcast platform [...] is simply not in the public interest at the current time,” Nexstar President Andrew Alford said.

Sen. Ted Cruz called out the corruption. On his own podcast, he discussed the Kimmel suspension, saying that Carr sounded more like a “crime boss” than a federal regulator. Cruz added that the situation could be “dangerous as hell” for Republicans, “if Democrats return to power.”

In Trump's inaugural address, he said, “Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponized to persecute political opponents.” After these statements, the FCC went on to threaten not just Kimmel, but also Disney and ABC.

This came only two days after Trump decided to sue the New York Times for a small sum of \$15 billion. Both of these incidents occurred because of statements that Trump or his administration did not approve of, according to NPR.

Using Kirk's death as justification is contradictory to his life's work and what he claimed to stand for. During his appearance at the Oxford Union on June 6, Kirk said, “You should be allowed to say outrageous things.”

The supporters of Kimmel's removal claim that the Trump administration had no involvement in the firing and that Kimmel was a net financial loss. Besides, they argued, Disney and ABC can fire whomever they like. Republicans use this logic to frame it as “consequence culture” rather than “cancel culture.”

Ultimately, people need the ability to voice their opinions without retribution. Without freedom of speech and the ability to criticize a presidential administration, rights that the country was founded on will continue to be infringed. If someone with as much notoriety as Kimmel can be targeted, then the general public's right to free speech could also be squashed.

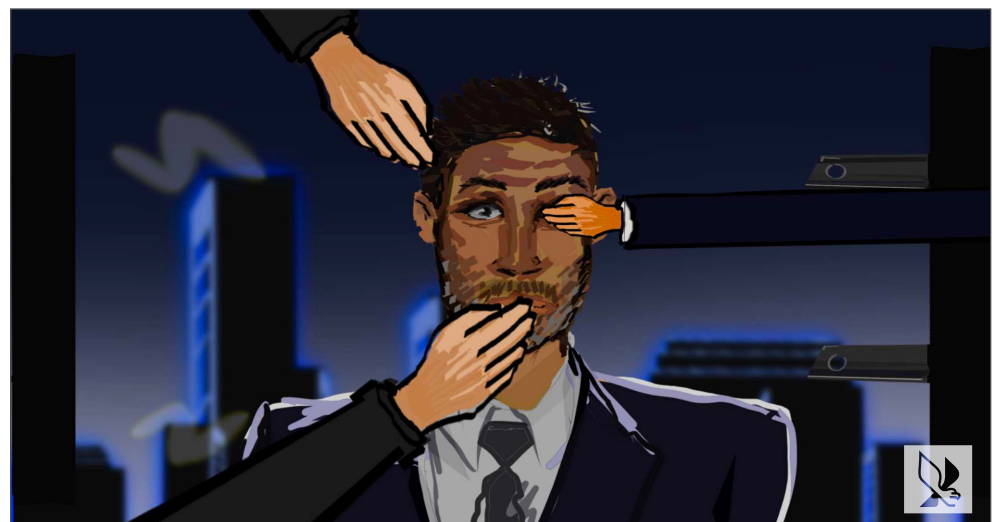


Illustration by Victoria Maldonado